



Portugal

Promoting Social Inclusion of Roma

A Study of National Policies

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Summary

The opportunity for Portugal to present the first national Roma strategy until the end of 2011 may provide a breakthrough in the enhancement of a coherent overall policy framework for addressing the poverty and social exclusion situation of the Portuguese gypsy communities. The need for such a shift in the policy making process in this field seems to address existing concern from different relevant sectors (policy makers, NGOs, researchers and gypsy associations and individuals).

The complexity of the social inclusion challenges facing the Portuguese gypsy communities in areas such as housing, education, income, employment, health and social protection has to be understood as a result of the interaction between major exclusion mechanisms affecting the overall population and some cultural and social features that characterise the diverse living realities' of gypsy communities in Portugal.

Data collection constraints have prevented a systematised national approach to the reality(ies) of the gypsy communities in the different social inclusion domains. Simultaneously, this data gap has been hindering the possibility to build up "knowledge" bridges which would be essential for the strengthening "social and cultural bridges" between Portuguese gypsy and non-gypsy communities. The persistence of discrimination perceptions and practices across different societal levels is a notable example of the importance to promote mutual knowledge and intercultural dialogue.

Nevertheless, the existence of numerous studies, research reports and surveys have managed to provide evidence-based portraits on several dimensions of poverty and social exclusion among gypsy individuals, families and communities. These portraits stress both objective precarious conditions (e.g. degraded dwellings, illiteracy and low education, unstable and insufficient incomes, precarious jobs, poor health condition) and objective unfulfilled access to citizenship rights (e.g. constrained access to social housing and private rental market, adaptation difficulties of the education system to multicultural diversity, inadequacy of the vocational training system to the actual qualifications of many gypsy individuals).

Progress achieved by the implementation of some universal policies (e.g. Social Insertion Income or the Rehousing initiatives) and by local intervention projects has proven that positive impact on the lives of vulnerable gypsy families and communities is possible. But at the same time it has also shown the limits of a policy approach that does not provide an opportunity for mainstreaming social inclusion achievements, for ensuring continuity of validated positive results and for overcoming major structural hindrances.

The reinforcement of existing governance arrangements or the creation of new mechanisms will certainly constitute a key driver for change (or not) within the context of the design and implementation of the national strategy. The possibility to deepen the participation mechanisms of gypsy representatives should be a key priority in this domain.

A set of recommendations are put forward addressing both some of the specific challenges identified throughout the report, but also some overall cross-cutting dimensions which are crucial for promoting social inclusion and fighting poverty and discrimination against gypsy communities.

1. The Roma population in Portugal – description of the national situation

1.1. The Portuguese gypsy communities: from common origins to national specificities

In Portugal the first written references to the Roma population date back to the 16th century. The history of the Portuguese Roma – “ciganos” – is similar to that of other European countries, both in terms of common origin as in terms of common exposure to repression and discrimination across the centuries.

Although the expression “Roma” has been adopted at the European policy level, its use in countries like Portugal raises several issues. The diversity of Roma groups largely contributes to this complexity. The Portuguese Roma original belonging group – the Kale – is not comprised in the overall designation of Roma which was (and still is) traditionally used to designate other gypsy groups coming from Eastern European countries.

In Portugal, the commonly used terminology is “ciganos” (gypsies) and although this is a word which has a long history of negative connotation, at present this continues to be the “accepted” term, used not only in official documents, but also in research and by the gypsy communities who recognize themselves as “ciganos”.

The present report will focus on the situation of the Portuguese gypsy population. Although recognizing that the situation of the immigrant Roma population is also relevant from a social inclusion perspective, a focus on the situation of this more recent group of Roma population would be very difficult given the lack of available statistics, studies or other information which makes it impossible at this stage to provide any reliable assessment on their situation. On the other hand, the nature of the issues at stake regarding the national gypsy communities and the immigrant Roma raises different challenges from a social inclusion perspective. The first relevant issue regards the fact that the gypsy communities residing in Portugal are Portuguese nationals and therefore have the same legal rights as any other citizens, whereas the Roma population in Portugal are immigrant Roma, coming mainly from other European countries and are therefore non-nationals. Their history of integration/marginalization in the Portuguese society has been necessarily different, shaped by totally different trajectories and different interactions with the non-Roma or non-gypsy communities.

Despite the long presence of gypsy communities in the Portuguese territory several authors (Magano, 2010; Castro, 2010) have highlighted the lack of research and publications regarding the situation of these communities. Only in the late 1990's has it been possible to identify a growing number of academic studies focusing on the Portuguese gypsy population. Most of these studies have focused either on particular communities (Magalhães, 2005; Bastos et al., 2007; Casa-Nova, 2009) and/or on specific dimensions regarding the integration of this population (Cortês et al., 2005; Silva, 2005; Castro, 1995).

In fact, the lack of available statistical information and the strict regulations to collect ethnic based information has raised important obstacles to the production of national-level studies on this reality(ies) and has prevented the development of any national surveys or “portraits” of the gypsy communities in Portugal.

The present report is thus based on those available studies and reports and also on information collected through a series of interviews with public officials, gypsy associations, gypsy individuals and NGOs, conducted specifically for this report.

1.2. The Portuguese gypsy communities: an (impossible) national portrait

Several estimates on the number of gypsies living in Portugal have been produced in recent years. However, the available figures are merely estimates given the above mentioned constraints regarding the collection of data on people's ethnic origin in Portugal. Some authors (Magano, 2010) alert to the fact that these estimates relate almost always to what might be called the "visible gypsy groups", which means those groups which present easily identifiable characteristics, namely those that "occupy geographical or social spaces characterised by social exclusion features" (Magano, 2010: p. 132).

In spite of the concern voiced by several researchers working in this specific field¹, there is still no sociographic study which provides a detailed characterisation of the gypsy population in Portugal, which is mainly due to the inexistence of an official source of information and data collection.

The European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) estimated that there were between 50 and 60 thousand individuals of gypsy origin in Portugal (ECRI, 2002), who are scattered all over the country. According to Nunes (1981) between 1973 and 1980 the total of gypsy individuals in Portugal was around 20,000, of which only around 1,600 were non-sedentary. In 1997, an NGO involved in the fight against racism, sent out a questionnaire to all the municipalities and counted a total of 13,514 gypsy individuals living in the 139 municipalities² which responded to the survey. Castro (2004) tried to collect all the dispersed information and to update it by launching a specific survey. She identified an approximated number of 34,000 individuals of gypsy origin living in Portugal of which around 4,200 were nomadic. These data would be later on published on the Report³ produced by the Parliament (Assembleia da República, 2009), where a new estimate was provided according to which there would be around 40,000 Portuguese individuals of gypsy origin. According to the same report, the largest number of gypsy population was found in the districts of Lisbon, Setúbal, Porto and Faro.

The Portuguese gypsy communities are scattered all over the country and the vast majority are sedentary rather than nomadic, contrary to what is often voiced by the general population. Some authors (Magano, 2010; Costa, 2005; Castro, 1995) highlight the fact that the movements made by the gypsy communities have different origins, many of which are not exactly a matter of "choice" but are rather imposed on them either by administrative procedures or by "security reasons" enforced by local police forces. Even among the so-called semi-nomadic families it is possible to observe strong links between them and specific territories (Correia, 2007) which they consider to be their "belonging places", contrary to the still generalized perception that gypsies are "naturally" nomadic people.

¹ Nunes, Olimpio (1981); Amiguiño, A. (1994); Sama, S. (2003); Castro, A. (2004); Reapn (2007).

² There are a total of 308 municipalities in Portugal.

³ This Parliamentary Report was the result of a series of auditions promoted by the Parliamentary Commission of Ethics, Society and Culture on the situation of the Portuguese gypsies in the context of the European Year for Intercultural Dialogue.

In spite of the geographical dispersion of the gypsy communities all over the Portuguese territory, there has been a concentration of many gypsy families in specific urban neighbourhoods, namely as a consequence of rehousing programmes which were intensified in the late 1990's, beginning of 2000. This concentration has in the vast majority of cases also meant spatial segregation of these and other disadvantaged groups of population. This issue, however, will be further discussed in the section on the housing conditions of the gypsy communities in Portugal.

1.3. The Portuguese gypsies: dimensions of exclusion/inclusion

Housing is one of the most relevant dimensions of the disadvantaged living conditions experienced by many Portuguese gypsy families.

Several studies (ONPC, 2000; SOS Racismo (2001); Castro, 2007) have focused on the precarious housing conditions which have characterized the situation of most gypsy communities living in Portugal and which have persisted over decades. In spite of the different nature and the different methodologies and accuracy of the studies available it is possible to draw a rather consistent picture on the housing conditions of the gypsy communities in Portugal.

In 2000, a confessional NGO working with the gypsy population (ONPC – Obra Nacional da Pastoral dos Ciganos) launched a direct survey in order to identify all the situations of precarious housing conditions among the gypsy communities living in mainland Portugal. The study (ONPC, 2000) identified a total of 834 families (4,398 individuals) living for more than two years in one specific area, in degraded or precarious housing conditions⁴. Among these families, over 61% had been living in such conditions for over 20 years. At the present moment, the ONPC website refers that “at a national level there are around 7,000 gypsy individuals living in shanties/tents, which corresponds to 18% of the total gypsy population”, for an estimated universe of around 40 thousand individuals⁵.

Over the years – but particularly after the Special Rehousing Programme (PER) launched in 1993 – many gypsy families were rehoused in social housing neighbourhoods which allowed for a general improvement of the living conditions of many gypsy (and other) families.

However, a study conducted by Castro in 2007 estimated a total of 6,516 gypsy individuals living in precarious housing conditions, including fixed or mobile dwellings, which according to her represents 19% of the total number of gypsy individuals she could identify⁶. These precarious dwellings were found in all the districts surveyed, although Leiria and Évora were the two districts which presented the highest percentage of gypsy individuals living in precarious dwellings (55.9% and 45.1% respectively). According to some authors, the persistence of a considerable number of gypsy families still living in very substandard conditions is linked both to an undercounting of the number of families to be rehoused in the PER survey launched in 1993 and to a non-consideration regarding the progressive formation of new family units, particularly given the long time gap between the survey (1993) and the bulk of the actual rehousing of the families (after

⁴ It is important to refer that these data did not include the municipalities located in the municipalities belonging to the *diocese* (group of religious parishes) of Lisbon, where there is an important concentration of gypsy families. In the diocese of Porto the data were not collected by direct survey but rather by resorting to privileged informants.

⁵ <http://www.portal.ecclesia.pt/instituicao/pub/65/noticia.asp?noticiaid=33411&jornalid=65>

⁶ These figures are the result of different sources of information: direct questionnaires sent to the municipalities and information included in the local diagnoses made within the context of the Local Social Networks.

1999). On the other hand, many gypsy families were not counted in, given their supposedly nomadic character.

Although the rehousing programmes allowed for an actual improvement of the overall living conditions of many gypsy families, it has been argued that many of these rehoused neighbourhoods were located in marginalized and under qualified areas of the urban tissue, spatially segregated from the "centres". Moreover, the rehousing of these and other disadvantaged population groups in such areas paved the way to the persistence of the already existing physical and social distances and accessibilities, and in some cases to the emergence of inter-ethnic conflicts.

An analysis of the information contained in the local diagnosis⁷ made by the Local Social Networks specifically addressing housing issues relevant for the gypsy population identified the following problems:

- Illegal occupation of land, houses or degraded places;
- Building of illegal dwellings or shanties;
- Temporary rehousing in wooden houses or containers;
- Social housing neighbourhoods socially homogeneous and segregated from urban centres.

Other more recent studies (Vicente, 2009; Assembleia da República, 2009) confirm some of the above mentioned constraints regarding the housing conditions of the gypsy population in Portugal, namely as regards the lack of the most basic housing conditions, amenities and infrastructures or the location in degraded and polluted areas in the margins of urban centres.

The harsh housing conditions experienced by the gypsy population over generations in Portugal may be explained by the confluence of different obstacles, of both objective and subjective nature.

In the former case, the gypsy communities in Portugal face the same difficult conditions regarding access to affordable and decent housing as other disadvantaged groups, namely the scarcity of the social housing offer and the lack of accessible rental alternatives in the private market. In fact, one of the most important key issues in the field of access to affordable housing in Portugal relates to the scarcity of social housing offer and to the late and marginal intervention of the State which for decades led many families of low resources to "solve" their housing situation, through the illegal construction dwellings.

Faced with other "welfare state projects", the Portuguese state never developed any actual strategic approach to housing, but merely tried to solve the most "urgent" situations. Social housing policies have, thus, not been capable of responding to the housing needs of low income families, given their scattered and residual character. Major rehousing programmes, implemented in the late 1990's beginning of 2000 managed to respond to the needs of many gypsy families, as long as they were residing in areas which had been covered by the 1993 "rehousing census". Many other families were left out of these initiatives and their rehousing would be dependent on the local municipal resources and priorities. The National Reports produced in the context of ECRI (ECRI 2002; ECRI, 2007) have recognized both the progress achieved under those

⁷ Information on housing was only identified in the diagnosis of 38 municipalities and not in all the municipalities involved in the Local Social Networks (Castro, 2007).

Rehousing Programmes (namely PER Programme), but also the persistence of many families living in very difficult housing conditions.

As regards the more subjective-related obstacles which the gypsy population is confronted with regarding access to housing some important aspects are worth mentioning. Some authors (Castro, 2007) highlight the subsistence of technical discourses – often embedded in local housing policies and practices – which justify the persistence of precarious housing conditions among these communities, by their “nomadic preferences” and the difficulty to provide housing solutions fitting these “different lifestyles”. This long-rooted idea of gypsy nomadism – which as we have seen is contradicted by figures – is reinforced by other negative social representations regarding the gypsy population which are widespread among the non-gypsy population. Several studies (Silva and Pinto, 2004; Pereira et al, 2001) on practices and representations on gypsy communities (and other ethnic groups) have shown that perceptions of “lazy people”, “not acting according to the society”, “involved in drug and other illegal traffic”, “provoking insecurity” are widespread among non-gypsies.

The confluence of these different categories of obstacles have a strong impact on the definition of housing policy priorities at the local level and on the persistence of local strategies that contribute to the continuity of the extremely precarious housing conditions still affecting many gypsy families. Castro (2008) provides some examples of local strategies which tend to perpetuate these precarious living conditions, particularly among those families which have resorted to illegal housing solutions, such as the occupation of empty dwellings or shanties in public or private land:

- Preventing access to water, electricity or other basic housing infrastructures, which according to local authorities would be an incentive for the establishment of other families;
- No garbage collection in order to allow the situation to reach an unbearable limit, and “naturally” push the gypsy population away;
- Demolishing precarious housing without providing housing alternatives;
- Not recognizing the status of “resident” thus preventing access to municipal services;
- Postponing the search for possible locations within the municipality for gypsy families, and thus become “non eligible” for applying to social intervention projects and measures;
- Promoting a negative image of gypsy communities and thus achieving an attitude of discrimination which often prevents the private rental or purchase of dwellings in the local community.

The media – namely local media – often voice some of these situations, particularly in specific occasions. The 2010 European Year on the Fight Against Poverty and Social Exclusion made visible some of the most extreme situations⁸.

⁸ “Dezenas de ciganos vivem em acampamentos montados às portas da cidade de Bragança” in *Jornal Nordeste*, data available in <http://reapnimprensa.blogspot.com/2010/08/dezenas-de-ciganos-vivem-em.html>; “Cidade em Portugal constrói muro para isolar comunidade de ciganos” in *Opera Mundi*, 11.10.2010, available in <http://reapnimprensa.blogspot.com/2010/10/cidade-em-portugal-constroi-muro-para.html>

Finally, it is important to highlight that all these obstacles occur simultaneously to the lack of actual local resources for the development of solutions in the social field and also to the objective lack of economic sustainable conditions affecting many gypsy families in Portugal.

In this context, housing remains one of the major integration challenges faced by the gypsy population in Portugal, which is widely recognized by the gypsy population themselves, by the official entities responsible for the development of policies in this area and by the researchers working in this specific field.

The description of the national situation of the gypsy population as regards *poverty and income deprivation* is conditioned by the fact that the regular available statistics which allow us to describe these aspects as regards the general population are not available for the gypsy population, given the above mentioned data collection restrictions. On the other hand, the lack of any national survey or study on the situation of the gypsy population in Portugal is another important information constraint in this area.

Therefore, the main sources of information are the studies which have been produced on specific local communities and also the information regarding the recipients of the Social Insertion Income, which has been one of the main instruments for providing income support to many gypsy families in Portugal.

Gypsy communities have been identified as one of the groups which have traditionally been exposed to high levels of vulnerability as regards poverty in the Portuguese society (Almeida, 1994; Costa, 1998; Costa et al., 2008).

The poverty situation of many gypsy families reflects some of the well-known structural elements that have been identified in the analysis of poverty among the Portuguese population in general (Costa et al, 2008), namely as regards labour market insertion, the links with the educational and qualification system and the frailties of social protection policies and mechanisms.

Nevertheless, the particular configurations of exclusion processes affecting the Portuguese gypsy communities may also be explained by the way those mechanisms interact with some cultural and social features that have characterized the living patterns of these populations. The nature of the links to the labour market and to the training and educational system are – as will be explained further on – also interconnected to those cultural and social features, directly contributing to an increased vulnerability affecting the vulnerability to poverty experienced by gypsy communities.

The first relevant aspect which has a direct impact on the income condition of many gypsy families is their position regarding the labour market, namely as a consequence of the changes which have affected their traditional economic activities over the last decades. In fact, the main economic activity of many gypsy families continues to be the vending business which has been facing increasing difficulties over the years, translated into a very common expression among gypsy persons: “the fair business is bad”. Vending activities – passed over from one generation to another – are increasingly becoming a difficult and insecure economic activity which no longer ensures the level of income which allowed gypsy families to live upon. The progressive extinction of markets, the introduction of changes in the timetables and locations of many fairs reducing their attractiveness, the fierce competition from large commercial surfaces, the devaluation of paddling and the repressive attitude of commercial inspection (ASAE fiscalisation) in the existing

markets are some of the factors which have contributed to the increasing erosion of the revenue obtained by the gypsy communities from vending activities in Portugal.

The loss of these traditional economic and labour activities was not compensated by alternative activities neither by the development of new skills necessary for entering "mainstream" labour market opportunities (Magano, 2010). As a result, the gradual loss of economic autonomy led to an increasing impoverishment and to the need to resort to the available social protection measures.

Moreover, it is important to refer that the impact of these changes on the financial condition of gypsy families occurs within communities operating according to organizational patterns fundamentally different from those of the Portuguese non-gypsy population: "Access to income among gypsies is not moulded by the institutional forms framing employment within the model of the salary-based society; the provision of social protection needs is made autonomously from the State, preferably by the family." (Dias et al, 2006: p. 35)

Most of the studies which have been produced in Portugal on the gypsy population have highlighted the frailty of the economic situation of many families and the need for them to resort to different sources of income which enable them either to face the costs associated to their vending activities or to complement these uncertain irregular incomes.

Resorting to the available income support provided by some social protection measures, by the Social Insertion Income (RSI), emerges as one of those complementary strategies.

Castro (2010) estimated that within the approximate universe of 50,000 gypsy individuals living in Portugal in 2008, a total of 21,100 persons were RSI beneficiaries, i.e. a share of 42% were resorting to this source of income. This represented 3.4% of the total RSI beneficiaries in the same year and covered an estimated number of 5,275 gypsy families, i.e. 3.9% of the families who were receiving the Social Insertion Income in Portugal in 2008 were gypsy families.

The report produced by the Parliamentary Commission on Ethics, Society and Culture in 2009 (Assembleia da República, 2009) following the public audition on the situation of the Portuguese gypsy population concluded that the Social Insertion Income was an important measure given the extreme poverty situation of many gypsy families, with a positive impact on the high levels of material deprivation experienced. On the other hand, it was also highlighted that the resort to this measure also represented an opportunity for the building up of "bridges" between the State and the gypsy communities, particularly as regards access to education and training and to other citizenship rights, namely in the field of social action.

Other authors (Branco, 2003; Dias et al, 2006) also stress the role of this income support in the survival strategies of many gypsy families in Portugal but stress some of the ambivalence arising from the use of this social protection right, particularly taking into consideration the above mentioned internal organization for the provision of social needs and its role in the building up of personal and social identities within gypsy communities.

For some of our gypsy interviewees the Social Insertion Income has "replaced" the income provided by some seasonal economic activities, often with a clear economic disadvantage, given the low level of income support provided by the RSI and, at the same time has led to the gradual disappearance of some traditional economic activities.

According to Garrido (1999) if the use of the income component of the Social Insertion Income has been an important survival resort for many gypsy families, the participation in the Programme has also paved the way to some important changes to embedded social and cultural traditions.

The insertion contracts established between RSI beneficiaries and the services establishing respective rights and obligations have also produced important changes to “traditional” family patterns. Such is the case of the training and schooling-related measures present in many RSI contracts, namely regarding the involvement of gypsy women and children.

The links with the *educational system* have been recognized – both by researchers, policy makers and the gypsy population themselves – as one of the main inclusion challenges still to be met, in spite of many achievements made in this field over the last years.

The progress registered in this specific area – namely by the impact of the conditions agreed within the RSI contracts regarding the attendance of school by gypsy children – has not been able to reverse the strong levels of school failure and school drop-out which affect gypsy children, particularly gypsy girls. The gender dimension plays in this – as in other – respect a crucial role, since gypsy girls are the ones who leave the education system sooner, either because they have to attend other family responsibilities, or because their continuity in school after puberty is sanctioned by the gypsy system of norms: after this age if the girl stays at school, she “will be talked over by the gypsies” (Casa-Nova, 2006). According to one of our gypsy (women) interviewees “the struggle over the school integration of our girls will be a long struggle. This is something we will not be able to change from one day to the other”.

In spite of the overall lack of statistical information regarding gypsy communities in Portugal – as referred to before – there are some national data available on the educational achievement of gypsy children. These data were collected for several years (from 1993 to 1998) by the Entreculturas data base (under the responsibility of the Ministry for Education) but it was discontinued. The latest available data (1997/1998) regarding the school attendance of gypsy children show that from the 5,420 children enrolled in the first cycle of basic education only 14% reached the evaluation stage in the 4th year. Among these, 55% were successful. In the 2nd cycle, the number of gypsy children enrolled falls dramatically to a total of 374 children. Among these, 85% reached the final evaluation stage in the 6th year, with a success rate of 75%. In the 3rd cycle the trend continues: among the 102 children enrolled in the three years (7th, 8th and 9th years) only 11 reached the final evaluation stage, of which 64% were approved.

Carrilho (2007) analyses the evolution of the enrolment of gypsy children in the education system between 2000 and 2004, resorting to specific data from the Ministry of Education. In four years it was possible to identify a very positive evolution in the rate of school enrolment in all levels of schooling, particularly in the 2nd and 3rd cycles of basic education where the increase rate was 39% and 34% respectively (from 617 to 857 students in the 2nd cycle and from 162 students to 217 in the 3rd cycle). Even in secondary education where the figures remain very small there was a significant increase from 7 students enrolled in 2000/2001 to a total of 29 students in 2003/2004. Unfortunately, the data presented are not broken by gender which would certainly contribute for a more rigorous and comprehensive understanding of the challenges still facing gypsy girls and boys in their access to school opportunities.

The persistence of obstacles in the access to the education system among gypsy children and the very low levels of school qualification among gypsy communities has been a common problem to all EU countries. The unequal access to the education system faced by gypsy families

may be explained by different factors, namely poverty, the persistence of prejudices and discriminatory practices but also by some cultural traditions (Gil-Robles, 2006).

According to Cruz (2004) the refusal of gypsy families to delegate educational tasks to any institution, up to the ages of 6-7 years old, who should always be under the “protective eyes” of their family members, strongly contributes to the feeling of mistrust shared by many gypsy families regarding *crèche* and kindergarten facilities, which they consider neither adequate, nor safe for their children. Nevertheless, the data collected by Carrilho (2007) referred to above, also shows a positive evolution in this regard: between 2000 and 2004 the number of gypsy children enrolled in pre-school (5 years) raised from a total of 818 to 1,011 children, representing an increase of 24% in four years.

According to some authors (Cardoso and Perista, 2007) in order to achieve further improvements in this domain, “apart from all that may be done in order to implement an intercultural teaching-learning system, it is important to promote the awareness of gypsy mothers and fathers – most of whom never attended school – regarding the need and the benefits of schooling for their sons and daughters and to define a motivation strategy that promotes the actual attendance of school by gypsy children” (Cardoso and Perista, 2007: p. 33)

Looking at the school trajectories of school-aged children, the effects of “endocultural patterns” still persist although not as strongly as in younger ages. According to one of our gypsy interviewees the lack of awareness on the importance and role of “institutional education”, together with some physical obstacles in the access to school (e.g. lack of transport, distance between schools and residential neighbourhoods) make it an accepted practice to “excuse” school absenteeism on the grounds of specific inconveniences: if, for example, it is a particularly rainy day the child may be easily encouraged not to go to school, as “it is better for you to stay at home, today”. On the other hand, many gypsy families need to circulate among different fairs and markets – in Portugal and Spain – or to make seasonal moves for specific agricultural activities, introducing a difficult balance between professional, family and of course school activities and, as a result, often children move with their parents, thus interrupting their schooling activities.

The available data and the several studies which have been made on local communities in different areas of Portugal have shown that gypsy children present the highest levels of school failure for the three cycles of compulsory education, even when compared with other school populations which also present school achievement problems, namely African-origin children. That situation is strongly connected to the unusual high levels of absenteeism registered among gypsy children and youngsters.

Some authors (Pereira et al, 2001; Casa-Nova, 2006; Cardoso and Perista, 2007) have highlighted the fact that the concentration of gypsy children in these basic education levels, particularly in the first cycle also seems to correspond to an intentional strategy of investing up to an educational level that gives them the basic skills which are valued by the gypsy communities, namely “reading and writing skills”. Any further investment on the educational trajectory is balanced with other investments, namely the need to engage in other professional or family strategies and their relative “actual importance” from a family and community perspective.

Although many gypsy individuals explicitly acknowledge – at the level of their discourse – the importance of pursuing a school trajectory, of improving one’s knowledge and skills as essential tools for a full integration into mainstream society (Assembleia da República, 2009), it remains difficult for many gypsy communities to “conceive a form of education which is not directly

connected to their real life: their family, their community, their social life and their economy" (Amiguinho, cit. in Cardoso and Perista, 2007).

According to different authors (Detry and Cardoso, 1996; Cortesão et al., 1999; Casa-Nova, 2002; Malheiros and Rosado, 2009) there are difficulties in the relationship between the gypsy communities and the educational system. In fact, the education system itself has experienced significant difficulties to adapt to the heterogeneous and diverse nature of its "clients", to value the potential of multi-cultural diversity, to face the ethnocentric nature of a curriculum which has been developed for a "Portuguese, white middle class, urban child" (Cortesão et al., 1999) and to engage in an adequate training of the different education professionals regarding the need to deal with children (and families) from diverse cultural and social backgrounds and to adopt adequate pedagogical and relational practices.

Education has a vital and unquestionable importance for the full participation of the individual in the society and for his or her personal, professional and social fulfilment. The persistence of long-rooted inequalities in the access and in the achievement of successful trajectories in the Portuguese education system directly affects – on the medium and long term – the ability of many gypsy children and youngsters to actually achieve full citizenship rights, namely regarding access and integration to the Portuguese labour market.

The decline of traditional economic activities, the general low levels of qualification and the low level of participation in training activities among the gypsy population, a "cultural and social preference" for autonomous forms of employment and labour activities are some of the difficulties affecting the relationship between the gypsy population and the labour market.

The insertion of the gypsy population in the *labour market* can only be characterized through the few studies which have focused either on specific gypsy communities or on specific issues regarding gypsy integration/exclusion processes. Once again, there is no national data allowing us to provide a national portrait of the labour market insertion of Portuguese gypsy population.

This said, it has been possible to identify some common characteristics and trends. Most individuals – particularly men – experience an early contact with vending activities by accompanying their families to the markets and fairs. These unpaid family tasks are common for boys and for girls, although in different domains: vending activities for the boys and taking care of brothers and sisters for the girls. This early contact with labour activities has – as referred to above – important consequences at the level of school trajectories among gypsy children.

Vending is, indeed, a common feature characterising the economic insertion of gypsy communities in Portugal. It is also an example of the preference for independent labour activities among gypsy individuals, which allow them to better conciliate professional life with other important spheres of their individual and family life, enabling greater autonomy and providing immediate income returns.

However, the increasing difficulties faced by traditional vending – one of those traditional independent labour activities – are resulting in a growingly insecure and unsustainable economic activity which, according to some of our gypsy interviewees, has turned "acceptable" some activities which until recently did not seem to be options: "there are more and more women who come to us (association) and ask if we can find them a paid job, anything, cleaning tasks, auxiliary tasks at schools".

Curiously enough, the fact that our interviewee has explicitly referred women and not men may be linked to some research findings which showed that men – even younger generations – continue to imagine themselves in a continuity trajectory regarding traditional activities, contrary to women who explicitly distance themselves from a continuity path within vending activities (Marques, 2005). The same author points to the importance of these gender differences particularly taking into consideration the fact those men “are prevailingly the authors of the definition of professional trajectories among gypsies (...) contrary to women, more marginal in the decision making processes regarding the economic activity.” (Marques, 2005: p. 84)

As for paid work there is evidence that it is usually carried out in unqualified activities and sectors, badly paid, performed under precarious conditions and often with a seasonal nature. Therefore, most gypsy individuals simultaneously complement this paid work with other traditional activities, namely vending (Marques, 2005) in order to increase the family income. Access to stable and more qualified work is difficult given the low school qualifications of the gypsy population and the very low levels of participation in training schemes and measures, which often demand minimum levels of schooling.

There is little value given by gypsy individuals to participation in the few existing training schemes and at the same time there is a feeling that these vocational training opportunities rarely match the interests of the individuals or that they give any guarantees for a better integration in the labour market.

Some studies (Reis, 1999) have shown, however, that among younger generations there seems to be a growing interest in engaging in vocational training schemes: among a total of 200 young people (between 16 and 25 years old) interviewed, 77% declared to be interested to attend vocational training. A growing awareness regarding the decline of traditional vending activities was according to the author one of the main reasons lying behind the emergence of these new perspectives.

Finally, it is important to refer that widespread social representations tend to stress the integration difficulties of the gypsy population regarding their labour market skills with a direct impact on the actual opportunities of gypsy individuals to find a paid job, even when they have achieved some training skills and upgraded their qualification levels.

Another relevant area where there is evidence of exclusion among the Portuguese gypsy population regards *health issues*. In spite of the lack of specific epidemiological indicators on the health condition of the gypsy population in Portugal, some empirical studies (Serrote, 1993; Marques, 1997) indicate that their health condition is considerably poorer than that of the average population (Silva, 2005).

Some worrying signs of health exclusion among gypsy communities were found in the relatively low rates of vaccination among children (Serrote, 1993), the low rates of medical follow-up during pregnancy (Silva, 2005) and an almost absolute lack of information regarding HIV (Silva, 2005).

These indicators have to be contextualized within a relatively young population where over 50% were aged up to 19 years old and only 6% were aged over 60 (Serrote, 1993), among whom there are high fertility rates which at that time were twice to three times those of the general population (between 15 and 29 years old) and where the average age of mothers at the birth of their first child was below 20 years old (Serrote, 1993).

In 2009, the Parliamentary report on the Portuguese gypsy communities (Assembleia da República, 2009) highlighted the fact that the average life expectancy among gypsy population is considerably lower than that of the general population: "it is estimated that the average life expectancy is around 15 years lower than that of the remaining population, child mortality is five times higher than the European average and the mother's average age at the birth of the first child is 17 years old." (Assembleia da República, 2009: p. 47) Based on the auditions made, the Parliamentary Report identifies a set of factors that help explain these asymmetries between the health conditions of gypsy and non-gypsy population, namely:

- The general housing conditions, particularly the lack of basic salubrity conditions of many dwellings;
- The difficult access to water;
- Resorting to health services only in acute or emergency situations, which does not enable timely diagnoses and adequate follow-up;
- Lack of a prevention perspective regarding the use of health services;
- The access conditions to health services, regarding waiting times, accompanying persons, long treatments which are felt as barriers to the use of the services;
- Different behaviours and attitudes by gypsy and non-gypsy individuals create difficulties in the sharing of common spaces in the health services;
- The low levels of schooling which are not favourable to adopting healthy life styles or routines which are necessary for improving general health conditions;
- Poverty, in general, preventing access to basic social systems.

The most recent available study specifically focusing on health issues among the Portuguese gypsy population (Vicente, 2009) confirms some of the aspects referred to above, namely the effects of the housing and environmental conditions severely affecting the health conditions of this population, particularly the high incidence of respiratory diseases and also the lack of access to health and social services in the area of residence which affected 35% of the total families involved in the study.

The author also refers the lack of prevention attitudes and behaviours among the gypsy population which, according to some of the gypsy persons we interviewed, is linked to attitudes and representations regarding both their body and their relationship with life/disease/death. The author stresses that among the gypsy women interviewed, around one quarter referred that they had never been to a gynaecology appointment, a situation which is particularly more frequent among younger women than among older women. More than 40% of those women who had been pregnant only went to one single appointment during their pregnancy period, and 22% had an appointment every two months.

The lack of prevention attitudes regarding the use of the health services is also visible in the oral health of children (64% of the children surveyed in this study had some type of oral health problem) which prevail in adulthood (94% of the respondent adults had dental problems).

Other authors (Silva et al, 2000) have also addressed this issue of the relationship between gypsy communities and the health services and have identified some relevant obstacles which seem to interfere from both sides:

"Doctors, medicines and health services are associated to disease and therefore it is better to keep at bay. (...) The fear to be contaminated by the non-gypsy society is symbolically represented by hospital food which is systematically refused and replaced by the food that they bring daily to their hospitalized kin (...)" (Silva et al, 2000: p. 6). On the other hand, "the health institution, in general, criticizes gypsies for their lack of concern with health issues and describes them as rebels regarding the bureaucratic operation of the system, non-complying with medical decisions regarding the take up of medicines and health behaviours, rejecting hospital treatment, except under limit situations (...)"(Silva et al, 2000: p. 4).

The difficulties which characterise this interaction between the gypsy population and the health care services were also highlighted in the different interviews made both with our gypsy and non-gypsy interviewees. Nevertheless, it was recognized that there have been improvements in this field, some of them pushed by the Social Insertion contracts' requirements (namely regarding children vaccination) and also by an increasing awareness of the importance of prevention regarding children's health. As for adults the changes are not so obvious, except among some younger couples' attitudes regarding pregnancy. One of the interviewees highlighted the role of the Evangelic Church which in Portugal has an important position among gypsy communities regarding prevention attitudes, namely concerning addiction issues, domestic violence and child and mother's health issues.

One of the challenges that arose during the collection and analysis of the available information (studies and interviews) regarding the description of the situation of the Portuguese gypsy communities was the persistence of discriminatory attitudes, behaviours and perceptions regarding this population. Some of these discriminatory practices and perceptions have been presented throughout the previous section. However, in the following section will try to summarise some of the most relevant evidence available on this vital issue.

1.4. From exclusion to discrimination

According to a recent study (Santos et al., 2009) on perceptions on racism and discrimination against ethnic groups living in Portugal, the gypsy communities are the ones who experience higher levels of discrimination in the different areas of social life, from access to public services to entertainment or use of commercial spaces.

Although formally Portuguese gypsies have the same rights as any other Portuguese citizen, in practice there are countless examples of obstacles they have to face when trying to actually accede to those rights. The several available studies on the situation of the gypsy communities in Portugal have identified specific discriminatory practices that affect these populations in areas such as access to education and to the formal labour market (Serrote, 1993; ONPC, 1995; Pinto, 2000; Magano, 2010), access to housing (Castro and Correia, 2008).; Pereira et al, 2001; Castro, 2007; Assembleia da República, 2009) and also the presence of discriminatory representations regarding attitudes and behaviours of gypsy individuals (Silva and Pinto, 2004; Marques, 2007; Magano, 2010).

The third ECRI Report (ECRI, 2007) clearly states its concern regarding progress made by Portugal since 2002 in the fields of racism and discrimination against gypsy communities living in Portugal, in areas such as access housing, access to employment and education, and in the relationship with local authorities and law enforcement agencies. Examples of discrimination in these different areas are identified by the report, namely:

- Housing – cutting off access to water and arbitrary evictions;
- Employment – racial discrimination in recruitment, hostile surveillance and inappropriate regulations regarding itinerant trading;
- Access to services – difficulty in obtaining bank credits;
- Education – hostile reactions of parents of non-gypsy parents leading to the transfer of gypsy children to different schools;
- Relations between gypsy communities, local authorities and law enforcement agencies – racist remarks from local authorities' representatives; arbitrary police raids in gypsy camps.

Several examples of discrimination were also presented to us by the people interviewed for this report who confirmed – our gypsy interviewees – which they daily experience discriminatory attitudes from non-gypsy people, with particular relevance in the field of employment and access to housing. Difficulties in job recruitment and in access to rented housing were the most cited examples of experienced discrimination by our interviewees usually translated into the “job vacancy that is no longer there when we arrive for the interview” or the “rental contract which they agreed with my wife, but then refuse to make when she brings my ID and they see I’m gypsy”.

These discriminatory practices not only prevent gypsy communities from fully benefitting from their actual citizenship rights as they also seem to nurture a feeling of mutual distrust and the enclosure of those communities into themselves, adopting a culture of resistance which reinforces their social exclusion situation. One of our interviewees clearly expressed this feeling: “It is very difficult to overcome the strong negative burden of a past of exclusion. Because it is not past, it is present. And we often react by retaliating: before you hit me, I hit you.”

The lack of mutual knowledge between gypsies and non-gypsies has been identified as one of the key issues that perpetuate these feelings of mutual distrust and practices of discrimination. In this regard the lack of extensive studies or surveys on the situation of gypsy communities in Portugal – highlighted throughout this chapter – does not contribute to establishing the knowledge bridges between different realities and also the social and cultural bridges which would be necessary to promote their social inclusion. At the same time, this knowledge gap also hinders the possibility to lay sound bases for a more coherent intervention from the different stakeholders – namely the State, NGOs, gypsy associations – addressing the promotion of the social inclusion of these populations.

2. Addressing poverty and exclusion among Portuguese gypsy communities: from practice to policy

There is no overall policy framework for addressing Portuguese gypsies' poverty and social exclusion. As referred to above the lack of systematic data bases or extensive studies on the situation of gypsy communities does not facilitate the building up of such an overall policy framework. Nevertheless, from the information available which has been produced over the years – either by the initiative of research institutions, individual researchers, statutory bodies or NGOs – it is possible to identify several crucial areas of intervention as regards poverty and social exclusion among Portuguese gypsy communities.

The NAP inclusion process in Portugal has in this regard presented an opportunity which has not been adequately used. In spite of the progress registered in the last 2008-2010 NAP where, for the first time, there were explicit references to the gypsy communities as one of the target groups to be tackled by the National Strategy. The 2008-2010 NAP identifies a set of risk factors for the inclusion of the gypsy communities in Portugal – precarious housing conditions, low educational and professional qualifications, difficult access to commodities and services, such as health, employment, education and training – and defines a set of specific measures addressing some of the identified risks and constraints. These measures included:

- the training of professionals working with gypsy communities;
- setting up of a specific Group (GACI) within the national body responsible for the integration of immigrants and gypsies with the presence of representatives of different gypsy communities, in order to improve the quality of intervention projects;
- developing 15 projects within the National Programme "*Escolhas*" in order to promote the social inclusion of gypsy children and young people coming from vulnerable contexts;
- to evaluate social housing experiments in order to define guidelines for the definition of future public policy initiatives in this area;
- promoting awareness raising and anti-discrimination campaigns in the media, focusing on the situation of gypsy communities in Portugal.

The inclusion in the NAP of specific measures was regarded by some major NGOs and NGO networks as an important improvement at the level of policy arrangements. However, further investments in the policy making process have also been pinpointed as necessary and urgent:

"It is necessary to define more active policies and measures aiming at the social inclusion, and not restricted (as until now) to occasional projects and policies which have no continuity or sustainability. Therefore, it is necessary to implement integrated and coordinated policies between the different intervention areas (education, health, housing, justice, employment and professional training among others) which should be included in a strategy addressed at these communities. We are thus talking about the need for a national plan for the integration of the gypsy communities in Portugal which actually enables access to basic services (education, health, housing, justice, social services, employment and vocational training, among others) and the accomplishment of full citizenship."(REAPN, 2008: p. 10)

Some authors (Magano, 2010) have drawn attention to the different State positioning regarding the inclusion of immigrants and gypsy population in Portugal and how these differences may be related to the “attitudes” of both populations regarding labour issues, particularly as regards “normal labour activities”. In the former case, there has been a concern to develop a national strategic approach (e.g. the National Plan for the Integration of Immigrants), whereas in the latter case, “few structural initiatives have been developed, and the ones made are ad hoc measures (...) One possible explanation for this different approach may be the fact that immigrants come looking for work, which is valued in social terms – integration through work – whereas traditionally it is assumed that “gypsies” do not accept those employed work jobs for cultural reasons.” (Magano, 2010: p. 175)

The lack of a national approach regarding the inclusion of gypsy communities in Portugal also means that there are also no national targets for reducing poverty and social exclusion among gypsy population. Nevertheless, it is important to refer that in the 2008-2010 NAP the specific measures defined – see above – included specific targets (e.g. implement 20 training actions, cover 2,500 children and families in 15 *Escolhas* projects, to create the GACI group until the end of 2008). The impact of such projects would necessarily produce limited outcomes. Given the multidimensional nature of the poverty and social exclusion situations and processes affecting the gypsy communities in Portugal, the setting up of such specific targets was not in our opinion the more adequate or efficient approach to addressing the challenges at stake.

The adoption of the 2020 National Reform Programme has, in our view, not even managed to give continuity to the process initiated in the 2008-2010 NAP. In fact, no reference is made to the gypsy communities in the NRP document. Chapter 6 on “Inclusive Growth” includes some measures addressed at particularly vulnerable groups, but gypsy communities are not included in these groups or referred to. This is a totally absent issue in the NRP. Absent was also the ACIDI⁹ – or at least the GACI unit responsible for issues regarding gypsy communities – from the consultation process which took place for the preparation of the NRP.

The concern regarding this invisibility of the gypsy population at the policy level was clearly voiced by one of our interviewees who has a managing position within the statutory body that is responsible for the development, implementation and evaluation of public policy measures aiming to promote the inclusion of immigrants and other cultural and ethnic minority groups in Portugal: “There are no specific measures addressing the gypsy communities in Portugal, because the gypsies have never been a priority at the policy level. It is sometimes hard to work within this context.”

This lack of a national level impulse regarding policy arrangements for promoting the inclusion of gypsy communities in Portugal is also felt as an obstacle for achieving further progress at the local level. There are good examples of municipalities that have promoted inclusion projects specifically addressing gypsy population and specific groups within these communities, but “it is totally up to them to invest in this area or not.”

Another obstacle identified is the lack of specific financing lines for promoting intervention projects in this area. The existing financing lines address different vulnerable populations and it is

⁹ ACIDI stands for High Commissioner for Immigration and Intercultural Dialogue and it is a public institute under the supervision of the Prime-Minister. Its mission is to cooperate in the definition, implementation and evaluation of public policies relevant for the integration of immigrants and ethnic minorities, as well as to promote the dialogue between different cultures, ethnic groups and religions (<http://www.acidi.gov.pt/>)

therefore difficult to understand the impact of those financing mechanisms for the inclusion of the gypsy communities, since the evaluation made considers the whole of the financing line.

The piecemeal nature of the existing policies is an aspect that was also highlighted by the gypsy individuals interviewed for this report. One of them refers the fact that although some of the Projects which are currently being implemented – e.g. the Municipal Mediators Pilot Project promoted by the ACIDI and the *Escolhas* Programme – have shown that it is possible to promote positive change. However, “we are talking about very small changes. These projects only reach a few municipalities. There has to be different policies. It would be vital to have a global strategy that could then be implemented and adapted to the different local contexts. But there should be national guidelines.”

As far as the existing inclusion policies and measures are concerned gypsy individuals have access to all the measures that are available to other Portuguese citizens. The main problems arise at the level of the difficulties experienced by the gypsy population to fully benefit from those measures and programmes.

Universal policies in the areas of social protection, employment, housing, education and training or health have generally been “blind” to some crucial features that characterize the social and economic situation of many gypsy communities in Portugal (e.g. the inadequacy of the available training programmes which are foreseen for the beneficiaries of the Social Insertion Income (RSI) regarding the minimum required qualification levels which in practice prevent gypsy men and women to engage in such activities; discrimination attitudes and practices in access to housing and employment; total disregard for the existing professional skills of gypsy men and women in “designing new” training and employment opportunities; precarious jobs offered to trainees at the end of their training period).

It is important to refer, however, that some of the universal policies which have been implemented in the last decades have had some positive impacts on fighting poverty and social exclusion among gypsy communities.

Such is the case of rehousing public initiatives which have allowed for significantly improving the extremely precarious housing conditions affecting many gypsy families and communities. This has been recognized by all our interviewees who have also highlighted the fact that most of the rehousing initiatives have been stopped in spite of the persisting housing precarity that affects many gypsy families. On the other hand, the lack of adequate evaluation by the public body responsible for the launching and financing of national projects in the housing field – IHRU – ends up in very different local realities and use of public funds for responding to the housing needs of the most vulnerable groups. It has also been argued that many of those larger rehousing programmes have created new “ghettos” which are not favouring the social inclusion of the gypsy populations – and of other vulnerable groups – but instead reinforcing the social stigma and marginalization towards mainstream society. Finally, the use of other more flexible mechanisms to address the housing needs of vulnerable populations – facilitating access to the rental market – has encountered in the case of the gypsy populations several obstacles, arising from the persistence of discrimination attitudes and practices from different stakeholders, namely private landlords. Once again, the need for specific dispositions in order to eliminate such bottlenecks has to be addressed when conceptualizing and implementing universal policies.

The Social Insertion Income is another example of a general policy addressing vulnerable populations that has allowed for reducing the intensity of poverty among many gypsy families and

particularly for reducing the levels of deprivation felt. It is at the level of the insertion mechanisms foreseen in the insertion component of the measure that most of the difficulties may be found. If in the case of children, the RSI had a positive impact in the enrolment of many gypsy children in schools and in promoting access to health care services, in the field of training and employment opportunities there have been difficulties in achieving success. Some of the problems have been already identified in previous parts of this report (e.g. inadequacy of training requirements vs. low educational levels; resistance from employers to giving access to gypsy people to employment opportunities; precarious nature of job offers).

In the field of education, it is important to refer that in spite of the progress achieved regarding access to schooling there are still complex issues to be tackled namely concerning school failure and school drop-out and the specific situation of gypsy girls. Several projects have been implemented in order to reduce the levels of school absenteeism and drop-out among these children and young people. The *Escolhas* Programme¹⁰ – often considered a good practice example of the promotion of social inclusion among children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds – is a national wide programme under the responsibility of the ACIDI and has managed to finance many local projects, some of which directly address gypsy children and young people and their school insertion and success. Launched in 2001, the Programme is now in its 4th phase (2010-2012) and at the present moment it is involving a total of 130 local projects. One of its axes aims precisely at promoting the school inclusion of children and youngsters, namely by preventing school drop-out, by promoting school success through activities inside or outside the school environment, by involving families in the school trajectories of their children and by creating specific educational responses for children and youngsters who have abandoned school without finishing compulsory education.

In the field of health promotion, some local initiatives have been taken in order to improve access to health among gypsy populations, namely by the integration of gypsy mediators in hospital and health centres in order to facilitate dialogue and increase trust between users and services, by the development of training programmes addressed at health professionals regarding gypsy culture and intercultural dialogue, and by the implementation of “home vaccination programmes” which tried to get the health centre closer to the most vulnerable gypsy families and communities.

Another national wide programme promoted by ACIDI and which has been positively evaluated¹¹ as regards its impact and potential, is the Pilot Project for Municipal Mediators. The main goal of this project is “to improve the access of gypsy communities to local services and equipment and to promote communication between the gypsy community and the surrounding community, in order to prevent and manage conflicts.”¹² This project - unanimously considered by both the officials, NGO representatives and gypsy representatives interviewed for this report as an example of good practice – was formally evaluated after the completion of its first year of implementation. According to the evaluating team “the Project Municipal Mediators has reached the proposed goals and irrespective of the synergies it has been possible to activate at the local level, there were clear visible changes which were introduced by the Project. In this sense, it is possible to state that the project has introduced social innovation in the territories where it has been implemented.” (Castro, 2010: p. 154) Nevertheless and in line with recommendations from different sources (REAPN, 2008; Magano, 2010; Marques, 2005), the evaluating team also alerts

¹⁰ <http://www.programaescolhas.pt/>

¹¹ Evaluation report available at <http://www.ciga-nos.pt/Default.aspx?tabindex=6&tabid=15>

¹² Programme presentation available at <http://www.ciga-nos.pt/Default.aspx?tabindex=3&tabid=11&mid=47&ItemID=548>

to the sustainability of this pilot project and the need to promote the complementarity of this project with other structural measures, with the actual compromise of local stakeholders involved in the existing partnership structures that operate in the territory and the monitoring of the intervention in order to ensure that the resources needed are mobilized and that the multiple social needs of the population are actually met (Castro, 2010).

In fact, one of the concerns regarding the implementation of local projects aiming at the social inclusion of gypsy communities are their short-term and occasional character and the fact that in spite of their positive impact in the short-term, their ability to promote durable and structural changes is limited or even inexistent. The lack of the above mentioned complementarity, the lack of political (local and central level) engagement, the presence of diverse and often competing local interests and the lack of resources and the difficulty to mobilise resources outside the public sphere are some of the constraints found, which prevent the continuity and sustainability of positive good practices in this particular field.

3. Governance arrangements

The High Commissioner for Immigration and Intercultural Dialogue (ACIDI) created in 1996¹³ is the statutory body officially endorsed to promote initiatives addressing gypsy communities. The ACIDI has played an important role in promoting research focused on the Portuguese gypsies, in launching national programmes for local level implementation, in supporting local intervention projects and in supporting the emergence of associations. In 2007, a specific unit for the support of gypsy communities (GACI) was formally created within the ACIDI structure, including representatives of gypsy representatives. The aim of this specific unit is to improve intercultural dialogue, to promote citizenship and to “give voice” to the gypsy culture and identity. GACI intervenes in four strategic action lines: 1) to mobilise and to empower gypsy communities; 2) to promote social inclusion; 3) to coordinate existing resources and develop synergies and capacities; 4) to promote information dissemination and sharing. The GACI has developed several types of activities in the fields of conflict mediation, vocational training and support to intervention projects (e.g. Escolhas programme). It is also responsible for a dedicated web page on Portuguese gypsies¹⁴.

ACIDI has developed an important role in promoting and supporting several programmes and projects that contribute to the social inclusion of the Portuguese gypsy communities and in promoting the participation of gypsy representatives in the implementation of those projects. Nevertheless, their own ability to intervene in some crucial areas (e.g. housing) and to be recognised as a key stakeholder in the development of national strategic plans addressing social inclusion issues has been very limited, as referred to by some ACIDI officials: “We have presented many proposals and ideas which could have been discussed and taken into consideration. For example, we have put forward several recommendations regarding housing issues directly to the IHRU¹⁵, but no feedback has been received (...). We have never been consulted as regards the National Reform Programme.”

On a different political level, it is important to mention the Parliamentary audition promoted by the Portuguese Parliament within the context of the European Year for Intercultural Dialogue. This

¹³ Then under the designation of ACIME

¹⁴ <http://www.ciga-nos.pt/>

¹⁵ National Institute for Housing and Urban Rehabilitation

was an important initiative in terms of: a) the political and public visibility given to the situation of the gypsy communities in Portugal; b) the opportunity to collect and summarise¹⁶ the existing national information regarding the living situation of the gypsy population in Portugal; c) the opportunity to hear different key stakeholders (e.g. gypsy individuals, associations, researchers, NGOs). In spite of the importance of such a high-level initiative, there was little (or none) continuity given to the many proposals discussed during the auditions and included in the final report, which would have needed a strong involvement, namely by the different public entities concerned (Magano, 2010).

Several NGOs have also been playing a relevant role as regards the promotion of the visibility of the Portuguese gypsy communities' issues and also the development of specific intervention projects (e.g. Obra Nacional da Pastoral dos Ciganos). Most of these organisations are locally based NGOs and their work is therefore limited to their territory, whereas very few have a national wide scope. A relevant example of the latter type of organisation is the Portuguese branch of EAPN which has launched several initiatives in the field of knowledge production, training and awareness raising activities and lobbying intervention.

Most of those local projects¹⁷ promoted by local organisations (e.g. NGOs, associations and municipalities) have been focussing on:

- promoting school insertion and combating school failure and drop-out among gypsy children and youngsters;
- improving the schooling qualifications of the gypsy population, and promoting access to vocational training;
- promoting parenting skills;
- promoting awareness raising regarding citizenship rights;
- fostering sport, recreational and cultural activities at the local level;
- supporting the emergence of local gypsy associations;
- fostering mediation skills and specific mediation training;
- improving workers' skills in inter-cultural dialogue in order to improve the quality of social intervention.

Although most of these projects have had a positive impact during its implementation stages, it must be stressed that their actual ability to reverse the structural hindrances that have long been contributing to the poverty and social exclusion situation of the gypsy communities in Portugal has been extremely limited, particularly in crucial areas such as housing, employment and income. These constraints are linked both to the limited capacity of local projects to intervene in these areas and to the incapacity (or unwillingness?) of important stakeholders (e.g. statutory

¹⁶ The report produced by the Parliament (Assembleia da República, 2009) is available at <http://www.ciga-nos.pt/UserFiles/Files/0eb9533e-076d-4aaf-bbbe-fca3e6fee013.pdf>

¹⁷ A list of existing local projects and their description may be found in the ACIDI webpage at <http://www.ciga-nos.pt/Default.aspx?tabindex=4&tabid=10>

bodies at both national and local levels) to introduce changes and address existing challenges or to mainstream some of the positive outputs arising from those local projects.

The role of gypsy associations is another relevant issue as regards governance related arrangements. Several gypsy associations have been formed over the last decade and they are scattered all over the territory, participating in local projects and partnerships. There is wide diversity among these local associations but their role has been limited by issues of financial sustainability and also by the lack of organisational and social intervention skills (Cardoso and Perista, 2007) that would enable them to develop social intervention projects in a more efficient and sustainable way.

The difficulties faced by gypsy associations was addressed by all our gypsy interviewees who recognised the lack of financial support and of specific skills which would be necessary to revitalise these associations so that they could develop relevant and constructive work: "there are very few good associations. Their role is marginal. Most of them are only able to protest, not to present actual proposals for change".

Lacking the financial resources, the technical and organisational skills, many gypsy associations struggle with a weak mobilisation capacity among their own communities:

"The association movement is at a halt and many gypsies do not recognise themselves in the existing associations. Very often the association is only one person."

"Associations get discredited and people (representing them) also get discredited."

Another issue raised by our interviewees regarding the role of gypsy associations is the fact that very often they are asked to intervene by official entities in different areas (e.g. housing, education or health) when there are emergency situations or open conflicts arising and they want associations to solve the situation according to their own terms: "We get urgency requests, we are called to solve problems on the spot, like the fire brigades. And sometimes they expect that the association has the power to get gypsies do what non-gypsies want them to do."

In spite of these difficulties, some associations and their representatives have achieved some visibility and recognition (e.g. AMUCIP which is the only women's gypsy association in Portugal), namely among official bodies and entities and manage to have their voice heard and to mobilise resources and support for the development of social intervention projects, in spite of the difficulties felt. Their participation in the policy making process, however, is often at the level of consultation but very rarely at the level of policy conception, implementation or evaluation and monitoring.

It is also important to highlight one recent initiative which may represent a positive step in strengthening the participation of gypsy representatives in the policy making process. A new initiative – taken forward by some gypsy and non-gypsy individuals – has been launched on the Facebook. This movement called "Portuguese gypsies and their friends"¹⁸ aims at promoting the discussion around issues relevant for the Portuguese gypsy communities and particularly to put forward proposals for concrete initiatives, measures and policies. At the present moment, there is discussion being held within the movement in order to build up a set of concrete proposals to be

¹⁸ <http://pt-br.facebook.com/pages/Portugueses-ciganos-e-seus-amigos/112281108796249>

delivered to ACIDI in September, which they hope will feed into the discussion and development of the National Strategy which will have to be ready until the end of 2011.

Finally, special attention should be drawn on the recent political governmental shift and consequent organisational changes which are expected in public entities and their potential impact on the definition of responsibilities regarding the drafting of the national Roma integration strategy. In fact, up to the drafting of the present report, none of the public officials interviewed who have policy responsibilities in this specific field have had any orientations regarding the whole process, given the above mentioned recent political changes.

4. Recommendations

The request by the European Commission¹⁹ that Member States should prepare a national Roma integration strategy (by the end of 2011) corresponds to an expectation which we identified in several studies and policy documents (CESIS, 2010; ECRI, 2007; REAPN, 2008; Magano, 2010; ONPC, 2011). Similarly, the reaction of all the interviewees (both public officials, gypsy associations' and NGOs representatives and other gypsy individuals stakeholders) regarding the announcement of the above mentioned request was unanimous: the national Roma integration strategy may represent an important opportunity to move forward in a coherent and strategic way regarding the effectiveness of Portuguese gypsies' citizenship rights and the promotion of social inclusion.

Awareness of this opportunity has even pushed forward two interesting initiatives aiming at feeding into the drafting process of the National Strategy: a) the drafting of a recommendations document to be prepared by the above mentioned movement "Portuguese gypsies and their friends" until the end of September; and b) the preparation by one of the major NGOs which has long been working with the gypsy communities in Portugal – the ONPC – of a specific document²⁰ with a list of recommendations for the National Strategy, which was sent to us following the interview for the present report.

Based on the diagnosis presented in the first section of this report and on the analysis of the several inputs collected – both in written and in oral form – we will present a set of recommendations which, in our opinion, correspond to some of the major challenges that need to be met as regards the inclusion of the Portuguese gypsy communities.

Housing and environment

This is undoubtedly one of the key areas where major social inclusion challenges are still to be met and where there is evidence that local intervention initiatives need to be strongly backed up by national orientations, support and monitoring. Thus, housing should clearly be a priority within the national strategy.

¹⁹ European Commission (2011) *An EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020*, COM(2011) 173 final. Brussels, available at http://ec.europa.eu/justice/policies/discrimination/docs/com_2011_173_en.pdf

²⁰ Included as attachment to the present report (original in Portuguese).

Specific recommendations should address:

- the clear identification of gypsy communities still living in extremely poor housing conditions at the level of basic housing infrastructures and access to basic needs (e.g. water, sewage, electricity); priority should be given to ending these persisting inhuman living conditions;
- the segregation and marginalisation of rehousing areas which have problems in terms of their environmental conditions, namely as regards access to basic services (e.g. schools and health care services) and social marginalisation;
- the need to rethink public housing policies addressed at the different needs of the gypsy communities and the different obstacles they encounter, by creating a range of diversified solutions (e.g. social housing, direct support to families, facilitation mechanisms regarding access to private rental market, pre- and post-rehousing support);
- to adequately and rigorously monitor the implementation of existing public housing programmes addressed at the most vulnerable populations (i.e. including the gypsy population) in order to assess its actual impact on the improvement of their living conditions;
- to reinforce the cooperation between statutory entities with responsibilities in the field of the design of relevant national policies (e.g. IHRU and ACIDI) and between these and local relevant key stakeholders (e.g. municipalities, municipal housing companies, gypsy associations and NGOs);
- to adequately profit from existing EU funding (e.g. activating the European Fund for Regional Development) which are available for supporting the implementation of housing related solutions for vulnerable communities, by namely removing political obstacles at the national level.

Education

Together with housing, education has been widely recognised as the other major area where social inclusion challenges need to be structurally addressed. In spite of the progress which has been achieved in promoting access to schooling for gypsy children and young people, it is possible to propose some policy level recommendations:

- to discuss and implement educational models that take into account the cultural diversity of the gypsy communities, giving particular attention to gender related challenges;
- to create an inter-ministerial support channel (between the Ministry of Education and the Social Security Ministry) to promote the implementation of specific measures for the school support of gypsy children (particularly those within the age limits of compulsory education);
- to mainstream successful experiences which have been piloted and validated at the local level (e.g. the law on social-cultural mediators which was approved but never came into force);
- to reinforce measures that foster access to education (across all levels), paying particular attention to direct and indirect attitudes and practices that lead to segregation in schools;

- to strengthen awareness raising initiatives among gypsy communities regarding the importance of school achievement in the inclusion trajectories of gypsy children and young people;
- to develop inter-cultural training programmes addressed at education professionals.

Employment

This is an area where – as described in previous sections – challenges arise both from deep-rooted exclusion mechanisms, and from more recent social and economic transformations that have increasingly affected the working opportunities of gypsy people. Thus, the recommendations that follow will try to address this two-fold scenario:

- to discuss and implement measures for the revitalisation of vending activities, namely their importance within the different local settings, their location, dimension and other relevant features that will contribute for maintaining a traditional but dignified economic activity;
- to improve and update management and organisational skills among gypsy people in order to help them cope with the increasing demands of developing own economic activities, namely those arising from the need to engage in regulated vending;
- to remove obstacles in access to credit for individuals lacking a fixed income source in order to allow gypsy individuals to develop self-employment initiatives;
- to promote access to job opportunities by introducing specific incentives for the employment of gypsy men and women;
- to promote awareness raising initiatives targeting employers and the labour market in order to improve the employability of gypsy individuals;
- to disseminate existing success cases of professional insertion of gypsy individuals in order to encourage employers to hire gypsy workers, to break existing stereotypes on the “employability problems” of gypsy workers and to foster trust among gypsy communities that professional insertion is possible;
- to develop specific vocational training programmes for gypsy men and women involved in the Social Insertion scheme, comprising the inclusion of a gypsy mediator, paid apprenticeships, specific incentives for the hiring of the trainees following the successful completion of their apprenticeship and dissemination of successful cases.

Health promotion

Communication issues and obstacles arising from deep-rooted cultural beliefs regarding health related matters are the main obstacles to overcome in order to promote the inclusion of gypsy communities in this vital area of individual and social rights. Some recommendations should be taken into consideration in the national strategy:

- to foster the role of gypsy mediators in health care units (health care centres and hospitals) in order to facilitate communication between users and health professionals;

- to promote awareness raising initiatives addressed at gypsy communities regarding the importance of prevention behaviours, taking into consideration the high level of illiteracy when choosing the most adequate dissemination tools;
- to implement intercultural training programmes addressed at health professionals in order to promote a better understanding of the cultural and social mechanisms that lie behind some of the resistances shown by gypsy individuals in adopting a “normalised” behaviour when resorting to health care services;
- to promote initiatives that bring health care services closer to gypsy families and communities, thus enhancing better mutual knowledge and trust relationships.

Income support

The extreme vulnerability of gypsy families as regards income poverty is directly related to some of the challenges identified above, namely the low educational levels and the precarious insertion into the labour market, together with the financial erosion of the traditional economic activities that ensured the income sustainability of many families. Thus, the implementation success of the above mentioned recommendations may positively impact on the income situation of gypsy families. Nevertheless, some recommendations may be put forward, particularly those that are directly related to income related social support:

- to reinforce the “bridging” potential of the Social Insertion Income (RSI) between gypsy individuals and the State (e.g. social support professionals) by promoting specific training on intervention in multicultural contexts addressed at RSI teams;
- to identify discriminatory practices that often curtail access to the RSI measure, thus endangering one of the few “survival” resources accessible to gypsy families;
- to reinforce the link between the income component of the RSI and the insertion potential of the Programme by removing existing obstacles related to access to specific services (e.g. training and employment opportunities);
- to improve knowledge regarding eligibility rights to social protection measures among the gypsy population, namely among particularly vulnerable gypsy communities (e.g. isolated or non-sedentary communities).

Governance structures and mechanisms

The success of the design and implementation of a national strategy for the inclusion of gypsy communities will greatly depend on the efficacy of the governance structures and mechanisms which will be either mobilised or put in place. The following recommendations will try to address some of the challenges that arise in this specific domain and which also contribute for the persistence of inequalities and social exclusion dynamics among gypsy communities in Portugal:

- to reinforce the operating capacity of gypsy associations regarding the improvement of their skills for developing social intervention programmes and activities and for an efficient use of available resources;

- to actively promote the participation of gypsy representatives in the policy making process, ensuring the conditions for a sustainable participation and a “voice” in decision making processes and not restricting that participation to “hearing or consulting” stages or to specific “talking and sharing events”;
- particular attention has to be given to the participation of gypsy women’s associations or other forms of gypsy women’s representativity in policy making processes, given the greater difficulties experienced by gypsy women in different inclusion domains (e.g. education, training, employment);
- to review the eligibility criteria regarding access to funding by gypsy associations through national bodies such as the ACIDI;
- to reinforce the links between the (forthcoming) national strategy and the existing social intervention structures already operating in the field (e.g. local social networks, local contracts for social development);
- to create “monitoring points” at regional (*Distrita*) level responsible for the monitoring of the implementation of the measures included in the (forthcoming) strategy which would report to the national coordination of the Strategy;
- to reinforce the role of the ACIDI as a key stakeholder in the development of national strategies and policies which impact on the situation of gypsy communities in Portugal (e.g. the NRP);
- to strengthen the role and responsibilities of local level structures (e.g. municipalities and local social networks) in promoting the social inclusion of gypsy communities in line with the national goals and priorities to be defined in the strategy and in coordination with regional monitoring mechanisms;
- to increase strategic cooperation between the different public stakeholders both horizontally (e.g. institutes, ministries), and vertically (e.g. national institute for employment and vocational training and respective regional or local services).

Overall recommendations

Apart from the themed recommendations presented above, it is important to highlight some transversal areas which would need to be tackled, given their potential impact in the foreseen process of developing a national strategy for the inclusion of gypsy communities:

- to seriously address the “data gap” on gypsy communities living in Portugal, which leads to an invisibility of the phenomenon – and the reinforcement of false “visibilities” – at the level of policy making structures and to problems of adequacy between existing policies and the living realities of these populations;
- to produce a systematic review of available data sources and potential data improvements which are essential for the monitoring of the impacts of the national strategy;
- to promote initiatives that actively contribute to combatting existing discriminatory perceptions and practices across all societal levels;

- to mainstream intercultural dialogue and intercultural knowledge across all public services;
- to systematically incorporate the gender dimension into any policy, measure or strategy addressing gypsy communities, in order to adequately tackle the issues and needs of gypsy women;
- to learn from analogous processes of national strategies' design and implementation in other social inclusion areas (e.g. the National Homelessness Strategy);
- to fully assess the potential of existing European Funds available to tackle poverty and social exclusion among gypsy communities and to remove any national level barriers to the full use of those resources;
- to improve transparency in the assessment of the use of European Funds regarding their actual impact in promoting the social inclusion of gypsy population, given their enclosure in overall "disadvantaged groups" funding lines;
- clear allocation of resources within the Strategy regarding the measures proposed and respective funding responsibilities.

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Relevant websites

ACIDI – High Commissioner for Integration and Intercultural Dialogue – www.acidi.pt

CIGA-NOS - <http://www.ciga-nos.pt>

Council of Europe - <https://wcd.coe.int/>

Comissão Nacional Justiça e Paz - cnjp.ecclesia.pt/

EAPN – <http://reapnimprensa.blogspot.com>

ENTRECULTURAS – www.entreculturas.pt

European Commission/DG Justice – <http://ec.europa.eu/justice>

ECRI – European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance - <http://hudoc.ecri.coe.int>

IHRU – Instituto da Habitação e da Reabilitação Urbana – <http://www.portaldahabitacao.pt/pt/ihru/>

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Programa Escolhas - <http://www.programescolhas.pt/>